

Faith & Inspiration

The Remnant Remains



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By Vincent V. Marshburn -

In the event that anyone might be under the illusion that the history of the Church since the ascension of Jesus and the imparting of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost has been an entirely untroubled and tranquil affair, it will be necessary to ensure that we, especially as believers, possess some clarity regarding the full record.

It is a lamentable fact that we sometimes face the worst kinds of torment and abuse not merely from those who deny God's existence or fail to acknowledge spiritual reality, but from those who assert some form of supremacy based on some kind of self-affirmation of spiritual superiority.

Jesus himself faced

opposition from those who were considered, in the culture of his day, exemplars of scriptural virtue and models of sacramental adherence. However, he was not overly impressed by their superficial exhibitions of piety and orthodoxy, instead accusing them of spiritual fraud and hypocrisy (Matthew 23:1-12, Mark 12:38-40, Luke 20:45-47).

Ultimately, it was the assembly of the prevailing regional religion who arrested and indicted Jesus on charges of blasphemy, and it was this group who petitioned for the death penalty from the governing political authorities. As it happens, this was no surprise to Jesus, as he had understood it would be so all along; John 1:11 mentions: "He came to his own, and his own people did not accept him."

Following Jesus's death, resurrection, and ascension, the fledgling Church immediately faced hostility and strife from similar sources. Following an arrest by the Jewish legislative and judicial court provoked by the efforts of some

apostles (who were in fact Jews themselves) to evangelize and perform miraculous healings and exorcisms, the apostle Peter offered this retort to the injunction against proclaiming the gospel in Jesus's name: "We must obey God rather than men." (Acts 5:29) It is important and interesting to note that this was directed towards a supposedly theocratic governing council and not towards some secular political regime.

The Church has endured and will continue to endure trials and conflicts from both without and within. According to Scripture, the Body of Christ will be preserved (Matthew 16:18), and the Bride of Christ has been promised the consummation of matrimonial expectation (Matthew 25:1-13; Revelation 19:7-8, 21:1-2).

In the meantime, it seems that the Church is destined to periodically experience trials and tribulations in various forms. Some would contend that the institutionalization of Christianity as a concrete manifestation of government influence and enforcement compromises the essence of the Church's purpose and efficacy. Some would seriously question not only the Church becoming an instrument of the state but ultimately supplanting or assimilating the state as the governing force in the land.

History demonstrates that such conditions of ecclesiastical and political melding can lead to unfortunate and grievous outcomes. The 16th-century Reformation was in large part an attempt to disrupt and

deconstruct the entrenchment of autocracy, compulsion, coercion, even corruption and nepotism that had come to define the civic infrastructure of what had become the Church. A number of prominent figures perceived that the Church had "lost its way" and were moved towards seeking a reformulation of Christian belief and practice in closer fidelity and cohesion with Scripture rather than questionable contrivances of human presumption that had arisen over centuries since the time of the original apostles. Many modern believers express deep gratitude for such rehabilitation of faith that often occurred at great and painful cost.

In a sequence of episodes of the "Star Trek: Enterprise" television series, the crew of the prototypical starship Enterprise NX-01 becomes caught up in an unsettling conspiracy surrounding Vulcan society and culture. For those unfamiliar, Vulcans generally tend to emphasize logic and control — even repression — of emotion as paramount for the progression of their civilization.

A precipitous terrorist bombing action exacerbates ongoing turmoil between the United Earth Government and the Vulcan High Command. Captain Jonathan Archer and Commander T'Pol are compelled to investigate the violent crime and end up on the planet Vulcan itself. They encounter T'Pol's mother, T'Pol, who turns out to be a member of the Syrrannites, a somewhat divergent faction of

Vulcans who claim to follow a more accurate and authentic interpretation of the teachings of Surak, the founder of the ancient Vulcan philosophy of logic.

It is in fact the Syrrannites who are under suspicion of committing the bombing, and Archer and T'Pol are anxious to determine the veracity of this allegation. T'Pol insists that the group, including herself, is innocent and that they are being framed as scapegoats by elements of the High Command who find the Syrrannite ideology subversive and contrary.

At some point, the living spirit or "katra" of the long-deceased Surak is conferred upon Archer's mind, and he experiences visions of Surak himself. Through a process known as a mind-meld with T'Pol as the intermediary, Archer engages in a metaphysical interaction with Surak during an era of Vulcan history in which they nearly destroyed their world in war. Surak solicits Archer's aid in sustaining the spark of reformation that is presently occurring among Vulcans by locating the Kir'Shara, an ancient artifact containing Surak's original writings.

SURAK: Good to see you again, Captain. My appearance must be quite disconcerting. I apologize.

ARCHER: Radiation sickness?

SURAK: We're paying a heavy price for our foolishness. Logic has not won this day, but this day won't last forever. Logic is at the heart of every Vulcan. Even as the ashes fall, my people are discovering a new way.

You can accomplish what Syrran could not.

ARCHER: But Syrran — SURAK: Was a Vulcan, and you're human. Which means you are untouched by a culture that can no longer see its own imminent destruction. We cannot let what happened to the Vulcans of my time take place again. Find what my people have lost. Find the Kir'Shara.


The actual plot of these episodes is rather complex, but in summary, the discovery of Surak's primary manuscripts leads to a reformation or "Awakening" among the Vulcan people, allowing them to focus on the fundamentals of controlling their passions and serving the greater good.

The frailties, flaws, and vices of humanity can certainly impact disciples of Jesus to the point where they lose sight of the original intention and significance of the gospel. There may be instances where what was formerly an organic, vibrant, dynamic, world-encompassing association of faithful followers representing a divine manifestation of the Body of Christ on earth devolves into a pretentious, imperious, bureaucratic, and unwieldy political or civic system which fails to express actual love and grace.

Even so, we are assured that God maintains his vessels of redemption throughout the ages (Isaiah 10:20-22, Jeremiah 39-40, Matthew 7:13-14, Romans 11:5, Revelation 12:17). Amidst any tumult and turbulence of history and humanity, the remnant of faith remains.

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